



Enhancing Healthy Lifestyle of UAE Nationals in Dubai

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General Note

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ABSTRACT

Living a healthy lifestyle is very important for lowering the chance of having chronic diseases related to lifestyle habits, such as Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, Hypertension and High Blood Pressure. More than 50% of UAE population are either overweight or obese. Government of UAE and governments of various Emirates in UAE have taken several initiatives to reduce the prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as awareness campaigns and early detection etc. In line with such initiatives, this research paper has investigated and evaluated the current health status of UAE nationals. Qualitative and quantitative research has been carried out to analyze the healthy lifestyle status of United Arab Emirates nationals in Dubai and proposed a basic healthy lifestyle model which can help in enhancing the health status of the UAE nationals.

Keywords: Healthy lifestyle, Smoking, United Arab Emirates, Non-communicable diseases, Diabetes, Cardiovascular.

1. INTRODUCTION

Majority of UAE nationals in Dubai are aware of the importance of living a healthy life style. However, there are still some facts and information that prove the existence of number of increasing trends in numbers diseases associated with unhealthy lifestyle.

People can do a lot to improve the quality of life but it depends on what they do to achieve their objectives. Individuals can live a healthy lifestyle by eating balanced meals, exercising, drinking enough water, not smoking etc. Living healthier can also help people enhance their physical feeling and increase their mental health as well. It will improve their memory and decrease the depression level that most of people suffer nowadays.

According to the ranking of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) diabetes is 21st century's leading healthcare challenge and UAE is one of the countries that have increasing numbers of its nationals who suffer from diabetes [1].

There are risks associate with not living a healthy life style such as contracting diseases, vitamins deficiencies, gaining weight, cancer, digestion and constipation problem etc. As a result, the toll of premature death will rise leading to a decrease in people's life expectancy and hence causing adverse effect economically in terms of expenditure on patient's treatments for chronic diseases and loss of manpower and working days. Also it has social impact as affected people will depend on someone else to help them and put burden on their families. This research will provide answers for the questions below:

- Are UAE nationals living a healthy life style?
- What are the barriers and drivers that affect adopting a successful healthy lifestyle?
- What are the driving factors which can be imposed to enhance healthy lifestyle?

In addition to that, this research will provide some insights into how to live a healthy lifestyle with focus on areas below:

- Worldwide, GCC successful lifestyle implementation model
- Existing initiatives and implementations in UAE and specifically Dubai that can promote healthy lifestyle.

The aim of this research is to investigate and evaluate the current health status of UAE nationals. The objectives are:

- Investigate and identify factors that contributed to the current health status of UAE nationals.
- Highlight main areas that contribute to the cause of this problem.
- Propose a healthy lifestyle model that could be implemented in UAE or even Middle East that can help

individuals and health organizations to implement and promote the idea of healthy lifestyle.

- Propose methods to enhance their healthy lifestyle.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has used different research methods to collect data which includes qualitative and quantitative approaches. They have been done to investigate and evaluate the current health status of UAE nationals and propose methods to enhance their lifestyle. Qualitative data has been collected through available literature related to healthy lifestyle and the articles from peer reviewed journals, conference proceedings and government reports which are related to the driving factors and barriers to healthy lifestyle have been reviewed critically. Also two interviews have been conducted with a nutrition specialist and a doctor who provided valuable information regarding healthy lifestyle of UAE nationals in Dubai. Field research has been done using sampling survey methodology to collect information and perspectives of 76 UAE nationals, living in Dubai, related to the various factors impacting the healthy lifestyle. This helped to propose a model that can be used to improve the healthy lifestyle of UAE nationals.

3. BACKGROUND STUDY AND MOTIVATION

This section reviews the studies focused on the importance of living and adopting a healthy lifestyle and the consequences or the results of not living a healthy lifestyle. A study conducted by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) titled "Smoking; finds that people live longer if they practice one or more healthy lifestyle behaviors. They have engaged people from US, those who are following a healthy lifestyle and others who do not. The study finds that "people who are engaged in healthy behaviors were 66 percent less likely to die early from cancer, 65 percent less likely to die early from cardiovascular disease, and 57 percent less likely to die early from other causes compared to people who did not engage in any of the healthy behaviors". In addition to that, the study mentions also the need for cooperation between clinical and public health communities to promote the importance of adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors. This study has focused only on certain behaviors of healthy lifestyle (smoking) but did not cover other types [2].

The second literature review is done for an online research that has been published on January 2012 by the US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health. The study came up with suggested recommendations that could be followed to live healthy. To start with by reducing foods that is rich in fats. Secondly, drinking sufficient amounts of water and other liquids daily that is because human body consist of (50 to 70 percent) of water [3]. In addition to that, water is important for food digestion, dissolving nutrients and carry wastes out of body [4]. Fruits and vegetables are essentials, therefore it is

important to increase the consumption amount taken per day. As per Cancer Council News, fruits and vegetables can protect against some types of cancer [5].

Third part of literature review is a study from the National Cancer Institute at the National Institute of Health which proved that the increased levels of exogenous antioxidants which are available in the fruits and vegetables help to prevent some types of free radical damage that have been associated with cancer development [6]. In addition to that, maintaining an appropriate weight and doing physical activities are important to achieve healthy life.

On the GCC level, the forth literature review focused on a study which was conducted in Qassim Region of Saudi Arabia about the dietary practices, physical activity and health education. This was published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine website on January 2010. This study talks about the serious threats of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and ischemic heart diseases which are among the top ten causes of deaths in Saudi Arabia. The researchers referred in their research paper to the lifestyle-related disease as 'the diseases of affluence'. They have used in their research a large database that includes dietary practices, physical activity and exposure to health education among patients visiting the Primary Health Care centers in Qassim region of Saudi Arabia. The outcomes of this research concluded that the women, older people, divorced and widowed people and those with low education are more likely to have poor dietary habits and lack of physical activity [7].

At the UAE level, the final literature review is on a study conducted about chronic diseases in Abu Dhabi titled "A profile and approach to chronic disease in Abu Dhabi". Researchers mentioned that Health Authority of Abu Dhabi improved their data systems so it will provide outcome used to measure chronic diseases numbers and do the suitable interventions. They mentioned that there was a screening program to identify high risk diseases done by Weqaya Program for UAE nationals. This enables to tackle the burden of diseases as well as changing or modifying health policies, and lifestyle and behavior change that can enable the individuals make healthy choices. They included the result of UAE survey level of physical activities and the result is 40 percent of adults under the age of 30 years reported that they do not do any physical activities and 70 percent of adults by the age of 60 years are the same. For females, the physical inactivity is at all ages were 60 percent do not do exercise. This research highlighted the need for change in lifestyle behavior to reduce the health risk factors [8].

To sum up the literature review, all studies reviewed agreed on the importance of living and adopting healthy lifestyle and the consequences or the results of not living a healthy lifestyle.

- People live longer if they practice one or more healthy lifestyle behaviors.
- Adopting healthy lifestyle reduces the chance of dying from cancer and cardiovascular diseases.
- Need of joint efforts from both clinical and public health communities to promote healthy lifestyle behaviors.
- Importance of regular health checkup to ensure suitable and on time interventions.
- Emphasis on the importance of regular data auditing related to UAE nationals diseases statistics to ensure that the missing data are complete and to build unified and accurate database.

The summary findings helped us to decide about what is the missing information about the health status of UAE nationals living in Dubai. Therefore, we designed the survey based on the literature review.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

As mentioned in the methodology section, a survey was conducted on a sample of 76 UAE nationals living in Dubai. The questions were related to sleeping hours per night, fruits and vegetables consumptions, smoking, exercising and depression. The analyzed data were presented and graphical format using bi-charts and bar- charts.

A. Survey Finding

This study is believed to be a valuable addition because there was no similar study that has been done in UAE aiming to identify whether UAE nationals are living a healthy lifestyle or not. In addition to that, there were no sufficient data to assess the current status of UAE national lifestyle. Therefore, a survey was conducted to identify whether UAE Nationals are living healthy lifestyle. If not, then identify the main reasons behind that and propose ideal healthy lifestyle model that can be used in UAE. Most of the answers were from female with 63.2% and the rest are male Figure 1. Most of the age group who answered the survey are between (21 -30) and (31-40) years old Figure 2.

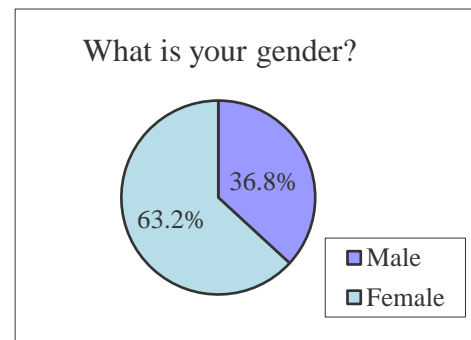


FIGURE 1 RESPONDENT'S GENDER

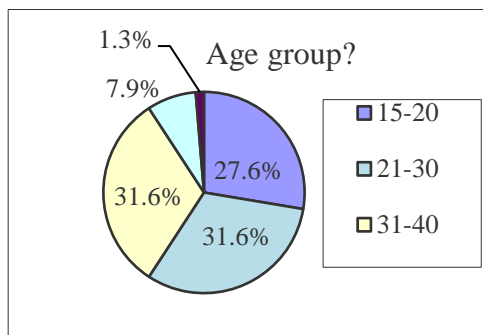


FIGURE 2 AGE GROUPS

60.5% are single and 39.5% are married as per Figure 3. Most of people who answered the questions are employees which present 50%, 32.9% are students, 11.8% are housewives and 5.3% are unemployed as per Figure 4. This gave an indicator that more than 80% of the answers came from group of people who face limited free time and stressed with working hours and studying.

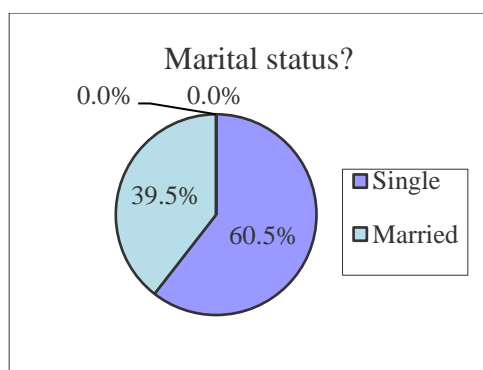


FIGURE 3 MARITAL STATUS

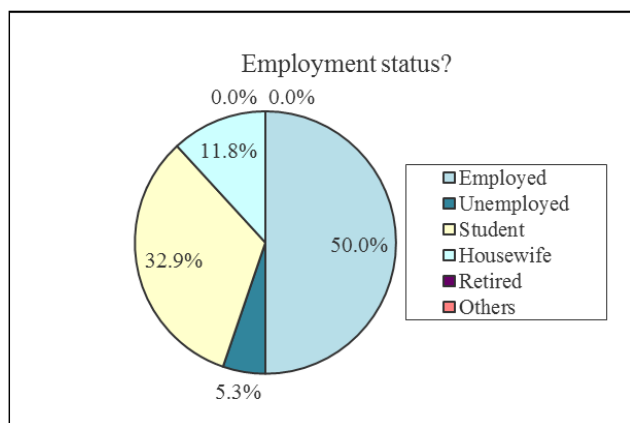


Figure 4 employment statuses

It is observed that people exercise frequently. Almost 57% of the respondents exercise from time to time and 30% said yes and the rest said no Figure 5. This is quite high percentage and it shows that UAE nationals are aware of the importance of

exercising unlike the perception that they don't exercise, at least among the studied population. However, the study population may lack time management skills to prioritize and to be dedicated to exercise. It was found that 63.1% of those who exercise do light activities such as walking and stretching and they prefer to do it indoors and outdoors as well.

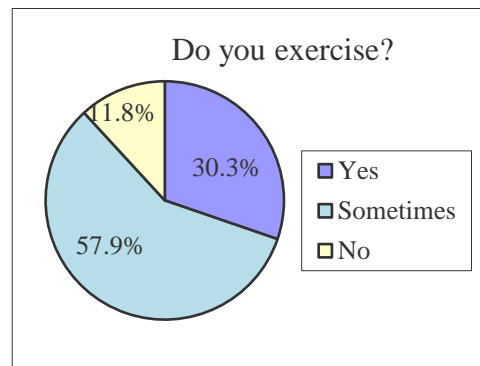


Figure 5 Exercising

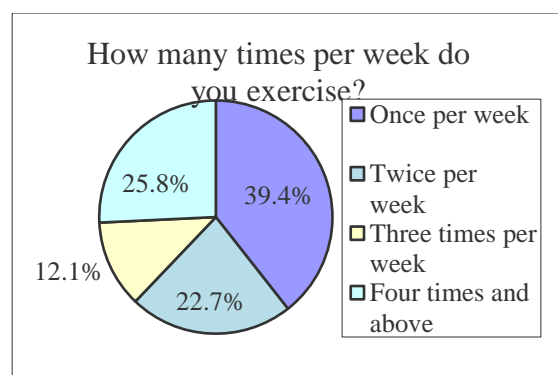


FIGURE 6 NUMBER OF EXERCISES PER WEEK

7.9% of UAE nationals smoke as per Figure 7 and out of these 45% smoke cigarettes and 27% smoke shisha, the rest chew tobacco products and combination of all Figure 8. For the number of years that they have been smoking 33% less than 1 year, 5 to 10 years and more than 10 years Figure 9.

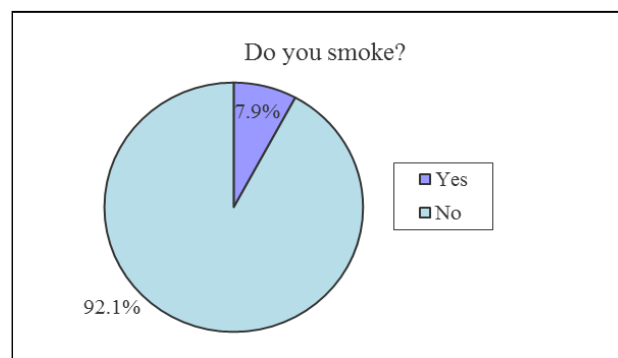
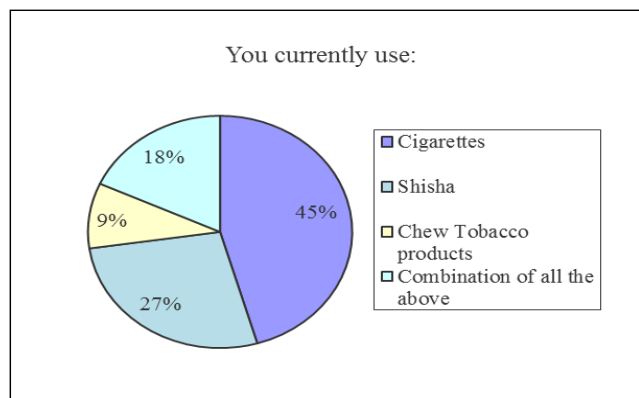
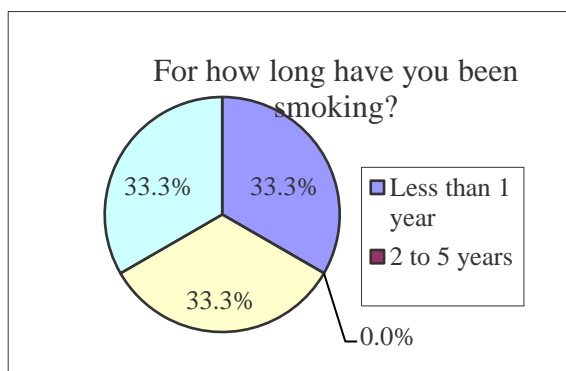
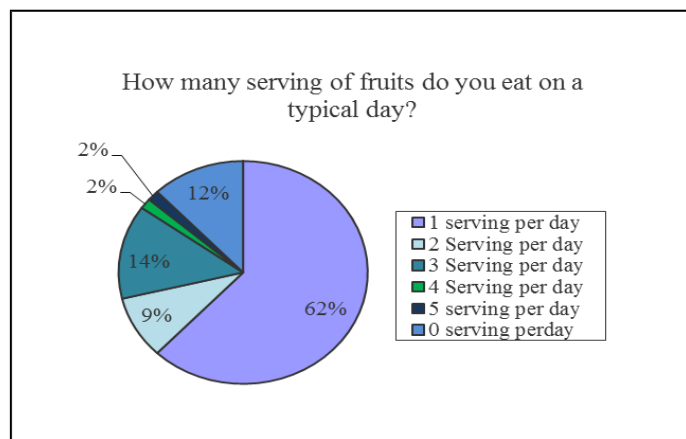
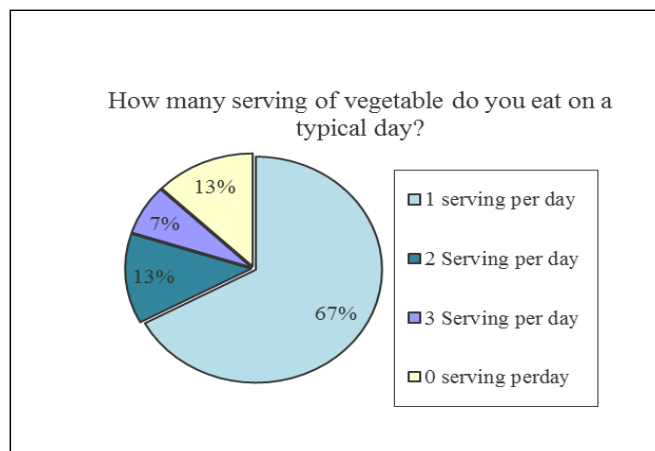


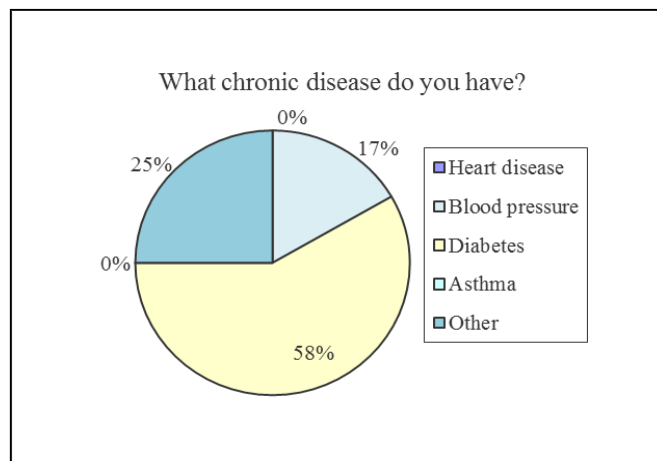
FIGURE 7 SMOKING**FIGURE 8** TYPE OF SMOKING**FIGURE 9**

NUMBER OF YEARS SMOKING

Regarding healthy eating habits, 62% of answers have 1 serving of fruit per day Figure 10 and 67% to have 1 serving vegetables per day Figure 11.

**FIGURE 10** SERVING OF FRUITS**Figure 11** Serving of vegetables

In addition to that, 26.7% are suffering from chronic diseases such high blood pressure 17%, diabetes 58% and the remaining are other types of chronic diseases 25% Figure. This result proves the fact that the UAE has a high percentage of people suffer from chronic diseases. 53.8% out the UAE nationals who have chronic disease exercise to reduce the risks associated with their disease and control it. About 67% of UAE nationals sleep between 5 to 7 hours.

**FIGURE 12** CHRONIC DISEASE TYPE

Also 52% suffer from depression, 33% don't and 14.7% feel depressed sometimes. The depression level is a bit high as almost 15%.

Figure 13 illustrates the percentage of the main reasons behind depression. Most people answered that they feel depressed because of work load which is 50% of the answers, 19% because of family issues, 6.9% financial issues, 8.6% because they are jobless and 15.5% due to other reasons.

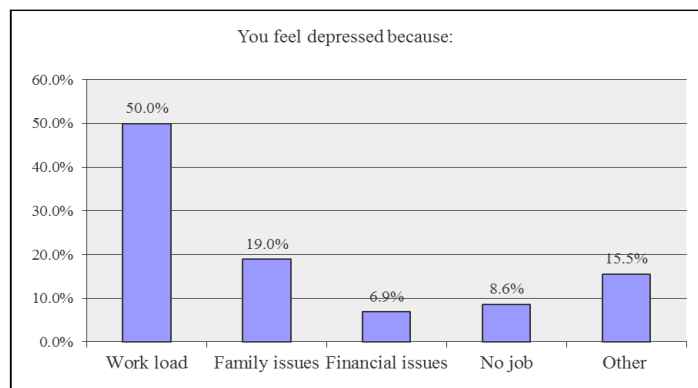


FIGURE 13 REASONS BEHIND DEPRESSION

B. Interviews Findings

Formal interviews were conducted with a doctor and dietitian expert about UAE national lifestyle. For the consequences of not living a healthy lifestyle, the doctor [9] mentioned that it can lead to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular, diabetes, and hypertension. It also reduces the life expectancy and quality of life, burden on government in term of health expenditure, premature deaths and effect on work performance. In terms of the challenges to promote healthy lifestyle among UAE nationals is the transmission from the dietary behavior to fast food and modernization way of living and this lead to obesity and increase the prevalence of obesity. Weather factor are against outdoor activities and this lead to restrict for the choice for physical activity. For the evaluation of current healthy status of UAE nationals, the awareness is more due to the multi-sectorial efforts promoting lifestyle so the awareness increased to some extent. In term of the ability to change the lifestyle even with a existing chronic disease and there is always a chance to reduce the complications and the quality of UAE nationals. In addition to that the management of dietary intervention and physical activities and smoking cessation will improve the overall health status of the UAE nationals with chronic diseases. For how can UAE nationals implement different ideas on their daily lifestyle such as exercise adherence to the best practice recommendation 30 minutes per day 5 days a week, mild to moderate physical activities which is a preventive factor against non-communicable diseases. Mental health and stress can may lead to hypertension and cardiovascular disease, so promoting mental health through awareness and early intervention through treatment may reduce the effect of chronic diseases. Also getting enough sleep per night is very important. In term of chronic diseases management early disease management will improve the outcome of the disease through reducing disease complications

and regular follow up with periodic examination can lead to better control and prognosis. For the healthy eating habits of UAE nationals, need to increase the intake of fruits and vegetable and not skipping breakfast since it is the most important meal of the day. In addition to that, cooking the UAE food in a healthy way and to increase the intake of water since it is important on different levels [10]. The summary of the interviews are listed as below:

- There are consequences of not living a healthy lifestyle on the patient and his family.
- The challenges to promote healthy lifestyle among UAE nationals to change dietary behavior.
- Healthy lifestyle changes are important such as exercise adherence to the best practice recommendation 30 minutes per day 5 days a week, mild to moderate physical activities.
- Getting enough sleep per night.
- Periodic examination can lead to better control and prognosis.

5. IMPACT OF LIVING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

The survey findings clearly indicate that most of the UAE nationals do not lead a healthy life style which is due to the life style and the pressures that they need to handle in their life. Surely the finding will be beneficial to the healthy life style of UAE nationals as the results would create an alert and awareness among the UAE nationals and make them think about leading a healthy life style. As everyone is aware of, healthy lifestyle comes through not smoking, avoiding stress, sleeping enough hours per nights, consuming enough fruits and vegetables. Also controlling the chronic diseases through regular health checkups and taking medications on regular basis and exercising. This leads to reducing the rate of chronic diseases prevalence and extend the life expectancy.

6. PROPOSED SOLUTION

This section has proposed a conceptual model that can be implemented in the Emirate of Dubai to change the unhealthy lifestyle habits for UAE nationals. This model is essential to ensure that UAE nationals living in Dubai can follow to reduce the risk of having chronic diseases risk factors and increase the life expectancy. Based on the qualitative and quantitative gathered data, an analysis was done to address the research problem and to present the building blocks of UAE national's unhealthy lifestyle. This proposed solution can be communicated to UAE nationals via different kind of media and health campaigns to promote for healthy life style.

A. Unhealthy Lifestyle risk factors

The Building Blocks of UAE Nationals Unhealthy Lifestyle which was done based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis explains the chronic diseases risk factors as shown below. These

factors can cause chronic diseases which affect the UAE national's lifestyle, reduce the life expectancy, worsen the complications and increase the burden of disease.



Figure 14 The building blocks of UAE National Unhealthy lifestyle model

B. Healthy Lifestyle Factors

Based on the findings and interviews recommendations, this proposed model can be implemented in Dubai to ensure that UAE nationals adopt healthier lifestyle to reduce the chance of having chronic diseases, live longer, reduce expenditure on health by the government or out of pocket. This model identify factors that can improve the health lifestyle. These factors are not difficult to implement but they need commitment from the UAE nationals to live a healthy lifestyle.



Figure 15 UAE national healthy lifestyle model

To implement the model, government entities that provide health care in Dubai can do the following:

- Do regular checkups for UAE nationals to ensure that they are not having chronic diseases or managing it if they have it.
- Monitor in each visit to a health facility or through home visits the weight and instruct when needed to reduce the weight and eat the recommended portion of fruits and vegetables. Also directing UAE national to visit Nutritionists for advises.
- Educate UAE nationals about the importance of sleeping enough hours each night as recommended to be 7-8 hours a day which is considered as healthy sleep by Mayo Clinic.
- Open more smoking clinics to help UAE nationals smokers to quit smoking.
- Creating a unified database which contains all the data of the UAE nationals that can be monitored overtime. This also can benefit the statistics to be more accurate when reporting numbers and this will lead to proper health projects planning.
- Support the government in the campaigns related to mental health.
- Open parks with exercise equipment.

Lists the health checkups for women and men developed by Bupa, a provider of health insurance plans and services in several nations [11]. Based on this or similar information, most important health checkups can be identified and made mandatory to the UAE nationals for job applications and marriages etc. these kinds of compulsory health checkups will not only help individuals lead a healthy life style but also create a healthy nation.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is important to continue the awareness initiatives done by the governmental entities in Dubai to ensure that UAE nationals are adopting healthy lifestyle. It's also recommended to do intensive health related programs and campaigns in corporation with different associations in UAE. For example, there should be a strict rules to control the fast food restaurants in the country and should not allow the increase of those kinds of unhealthy restaurants in the country. On the other hand, respective organizations should encourage and support the establishment of healthy restaurants that serve healthy food for different target customers depending on their health state. In addition to that, number of public health clubs should be increased and should provide special discounts especially for UAE nationals and their families to encourage them to exercise and make it as a habit and part of their lifestyle. It is not too late to control the effect of the chronic

diseases and to reduce the prevalence. The research requires and update in the coming years to reevaluate the healthy

lifestyle of UAE national living in Dubai and to update the model accordingly.

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